

# JUDGES: SPIRITUAL WARFARE

## GIDEON PERSEVERES

### Judges 6:1-8:32

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“And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them” (Judges 8:4 AV/KJV).

A few years ago we asked a colleague how her Flemish was coming along. We were visiting the teams in Belgium. She had been on our team the previous year in London. We wanted to know how she was doing learning a new language. She responded by saying, “Oh, I’m doing great! I can speak conversational Flemish! But it does take discipline and perseverance.”

Often in 1992, when I phoned another colleague he was usually in a committee In Barcelona meeting in preparation for the international outreach to the Olympics. At other times he was in Seville, southern Spain, with the EXPO 92 committee, or visiting one of the teams. He would exclaim, “It’s not the work that tires us; we enjoy working! It’s all the setbacks and difficulties!”

Webster’s New World Dictionary says that “to persevere” means “to continue a course of action, etc. in spite of difficulty, opposition, etc.” (Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, David B. Guralnik, Editor in Chief, William Collins Publishers, Inc., 1979) Microsoft Word’s thesaurus gives the following words as synonyms of the word persevere, “persist, continue, keep at it, keep on, carry on, keep trying, and stick with (it).”

Gideon met wave after wave of difficulties and persevered:

- I. **Fear.** The context is Judges 6:11-24. When Gideon realized that God had met him at the wine press where he was hiding his wheat threshing from the Midianites, he trembled in fear, afraid that God would strike him down on the spot (Judges 6:22-24). What better than the fear of God?
  - A. ***People do fear him but then they try to ignore Him or pretend He does not exist. Romans 5:1 tells us, who have put our faith in Jesus, that we have “peace with God”.***
  - B. ***Fears from your past life, or from periods in your Christian life when you were living carnally, might try to return. Reject them. Remember that all things have become new according to I Corinthians 5:17.***
- II. **Threats.** The Lord ordered Gideon to destroy his father’s altar to Baal and the Asherah pole next to it and build an altar to the Lord.
  - A. ***These altars to Baal were up to 26 feet (8 meters) across in size. He took ten household servants to help him destroy it. Gideon needed the “muscle” of 10 servants to help him tear the altar***

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*down, but it reminds me that if he did not have the “muscle” or authority of the Ten Commandments behind him he may not have done it.*

- B.** *The men of the town threatened to kill him for destroying the altar to Baal (Judges 6:28-30). Gideon became a great testimony to his family. That is not always easy, especially if you are a teenager.*
- C.** *The family is watching you and expecting you to help bear the family burden when really you haven't done it before. If you “testify” a lot but don't help with family chores they may not listen.*
- D.** *In some ways it was easier for Gideon, being a full adult with his own family, and a workingman. The threats to him as an adult were, however, frightening, because they wanted to kill him.*

**III. Doubts.** When the Midianite army gathered like locusts for number, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and Gideon recruited his army. But he wrestled with doubt. Would the Lord really save Israel through him?

- A.** *He put out the fleece twice as a test (Judges 6:36-40). It is amazing to think that Gideon would still entertain doubts even after the Spirit had come upon him! But the Christian life is like that, as well. However Gideon's doubt was not the unbelief of sin and rebellion spoken of in Hebrews 3 and 4, referring to those who came out of Egypt. That example is akin to the attitude and actions of the Pharisees who came asking Jesus for a sign, tempting or testing Him. Gideon loved the Lord and wanted to do God's will but faced doubts. That isn't wrong. Notice God's patience with him when he put out the fleece.*
- B.** *God does want to guide us. Psalm 48:14 says, “that He is our God forever and ever and He will be our guide even to death.” That is the best coverage of all. Don't look to the stars or to those who think they can interpret heavenly signs. Deuteronomy 4:19 states:*

*And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven (ESV).*

**IV. Weakness.** Strengthened in his resolve to keep going, after putting out the fleece twice, he led out the troops.

- A.** *Through the fleece Gideon had asked God to show his commitment to Gideon. But now God was to test Gideon's commitment to God. In two steps (Remember, he put out the fleece twice!) God reduced his precious recruits from 32,000 to just 300! But Gideon kept going (Judges 7:1-8).*

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- B.** *1 Corinthians 1:26-31 tells us we are not many wise or strong. Why? God will receive the glory. And if we boast, let us boast in Him. Maybe you feel your educational or economic impotence or, what you think is weakness in gifting or spiritual life. Almost everyone, if not everyone struggles with these thoughts.*
- C.** *Gideon said he was of the smallest clan in the tribe of Manasseh. How could God call on Him to do anything? Moses claimed he was clumsy of speech! God provided help in Aaron (Exodus 1 through 4). In Jeremiah chapter one when Jeremiah said he was just a child, and therefore could not be God's prophet, God told Jeremiah he would make him like a fortified city, an iron post and a bronze wall!*
- V. Criticism.** After the battle began, others came from surrounding tribes to participate, including the men of Ephraim.
- A.** *The men of Ephraim caught the two Midianite princes and destroyed them at the Jordan. However, they criticized Gideon for not calling them out to the battle first! He answered them peacefully and kept right on going in pursuit of the two kings of Midian and the rest of their army (Judges 7:24-8:3).*
- B.** *Gideon learned peace from the God of peace. When Paul opens his letters with "grace" and "peace", these are not idle words. Remember the peacemakers of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount?*
- C.** *I am so prone to answer in anger! Recently I wrote an e-mail to someone in anger, but knew I could not send it. I then thought about it, prayed and reworded the whole thing so that it was much more peaceful. Years ago while preparing the visit of the ship Logos to Bilbao, Spain, I got so angry with a printer there because he produced some posters very late. Later I had to return and apologize for my terrible attitude and words to him.*
- D.** *Gideon praised his critics! He said, "God gave the two leaders Oreb and Zeeb into your hands. What have I done compared to you?" That is amazing. What an example. He had led the army into a frightening battle and yet he had room to praise those who came later to help a little.*
- E.** *What about the new person on the team or in the church who criticizes you? Can you react like Gideon?*
- VI. Tiredness.** At this point Gideon crossed Jordan with the 300, faint, yet pursuing (Judges 8:4).
- A.** *It is actually good to suffer tiredness. There are those who can't sleep because they aren't tired. Maybe they don't work. There are those who can't sleep because of tension. They feel tired, not for*

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*work but for worry. Jet lag can really get to me at times especially if I am facing a schedule at my destination.*

**B.** *Gideon was chasing an army on the run. They attacked at night and fought overnight, and now they had to pursue that army through the following day.*

VII. **Rejection.** On the east side of the Jordan at both the cities of Succoth and Penuel he was refused food for his fainting army (Judges 8:5-9).

**A.** *Some people can't go on teams across the country or to other lands, but they can help with the ministry in other ways. They have collaborated and they have been a blessing.*

**B.** *The folk in these cities had not joined in the battle against the Midianites but they might have helped when asked by Gideon for food for his fainting army in hot pursuit of the enemy, because Gideon had not yet captured the two kings, Zebah and Zalmuna. All he got was a sarcastic reply from the city officials of Succoth and Penuel, "Do you already have the heads of Zebah and Zalmuna in your hands? Why should we give bread to your troops? (NIV)" Later he returned and disciplined them for not helping.*

VIII. **Distance.** Gideon pursued the remaining enemy of 15,000, and the 2 kings, far over to the east side of the Jordan (Judges 8:10-12).

**A.** *Gideon finally destroyed the Midianite army and captured their two kings! He persevered to the end of the conflict. Instead of saying to himself that he only needed to get the Midianites out of his back yard, which ended at the Jordan, he took the battle to them and as far as he had to go, in order to defeat them. Midian was a very mobile nomadic army that came and went, stealing their food and cattle, not settling in the land, but taking from it, so he knew they would show up again if he did not gain a complete victory.*

**B.** *By going the distance Gideon would also help and protect the tribes that lived on the east side of the Jordan. It reminds me of an exhortation of Paul to Archippus in Colossians 4:17, "And say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord' (ESV)." Remember as well that the Christian life is not a sprint, but a long distance run.*

Gideon, what an example of perseverance!

What is discouraging you from persevering? Is it trying to get that accent right in language learning? Planting a new church? Loosing 5000 addresses on the computer? Asking your child to put his school bag in the closet for the 500<sup>th</sup> time? A wrinkled relationship with a fellow team member? A member of the family turning

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away from the Lord? Wrestling with sin in your life? A friend coming down with AIDS?

We do need perseverance. Gideon though faint, pursued! As they say in Malaysia, he was “steady-la”! He kept going. He stuck with it. He continued. He carried on. **HE PERSEVERED.**

Judges chapters 6 to 8 will fill you in on how God built perseverance into Gideon’s life. It is an exciting story!